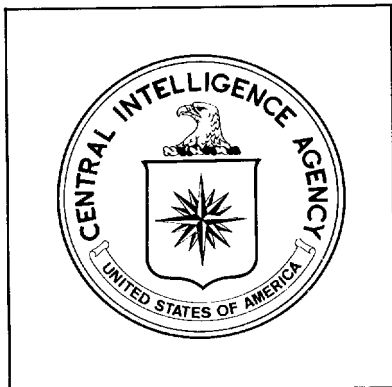


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STAFF NOTES:

Soviet Union Eastern Europe

State Department review completed

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SOVIET UNION - EASTERN EUROPE



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Gromyko Concludes Discussions in Damascus

The communique marking the end of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko's visit to Syria calls for the reconvening of the Geneva conference within a month. The USSR and Syria may be trying to apply pressure on Egypt to accept a deadline in its own negotiations on Sinai. The Soviets may also view the communique statement as committing Damascus to forgoing tri-lateral negotiations on the Golan front in favor of Geneva.

Other aspects of the visit seemed orchestrated for their impact on the Egyptians. Gromyko's banquet statement that the Russians "know how to evaluate real friendship" seemed in the context of his lavish praise of the Syrians to be an implicit slap at Sadat.

Although the Soviets reiterated their commitment to strengthening Syria's military capability, the visit seemed short on substantive assistance. Gromyko did no more than sign previously negotiated agreements on economic and scientific cooperation.

Gromyko delivered a personal message from Brezhnev to President Asad, and Brezhnev's contribution to Soviet-Syrian relations was specifically mentioned in the communique. Gromyko invited the Syrian foreign minister to Moscow, but there was no reference to re-scheduling Brezhnev's trip.

While in Damascus, Gromyko met with fedayeen leader Yasir Arafat and, during his banquet speech, made Moscow's first explicit call for a Palestinian "state." Previously, Moscow had only endorsed a Palestinian "national home" or "statehood," and the Soviet-Syrian communique omitted any reference to either Palestinian "statehood" or a Palestinian "state."



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Soviets Take Tough Stand at
European Security Talks

The Soviets appear to be in no hurry to compromise on outstanding issues at the European security talks. During a luncheon with US delegates on January 31, the Soviets scoffed at Western proposals on military-related "confidence-building" measures such as advance notification of maneuvers.

The Soviets were also unyielding on "human contacts" issues. One point of increasing controversy concerns the disparity in the French and Russian language texts of the introductory statement on human contacts. At several points the Russian version implies less of a commitment to expand contacts than does the French. The Soviets maintain that the texts are identical and refuse to accept any changes. Similar problems could arise with other conference documents; a Soviet representative called this a "time bomb" ticking under the conference.



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During the meeting with the US delegation, chief Soviet delegate Kovalev said that the final conference documents would be signed by the Soviet "Chief of State." This is the first time the Soviets have used such a formulation. Normally they speak of holding the concluding stage "at the highest level"-- a formulation that would allow for the participation

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of party chief Brezhnev. If Kovalev is to be taken literally, the USSR would be represented by President Podgorny.

While the Soviets continue in public to express confidence in the rapid conclusion of the security conference, they are apparently prepared to hold out at the bargaining table to gain further western concessions. By making only the minimal concessions required to keep the negotiations from bogging down, the Soviets have presented the West Europeans with a dilemma. The West Europeans are unwilling to abandon their essential negotiating goals, but they will have difficulty making a tough stance convincing to the Soviets because Moscow is well aware that the West Europeans are now resigned to ending the conference this summer.

The UK, until recently one of the most unbending Western countries on security conference issues, has been taking the lead in suggesting revisions to the Allied position. Some Allies suspect that London is trying to pave the way for Wilson's visit to Moscow later this month.

The British have received widespread support for their suggestion that the Allies abandon their proposal for advance notice of major military movements by either side as a "confidence-building measure." The West Europeans are ready to bargain hard for other measures, however, and may even threaten to hold up agreement on a number of security principles of importance to the Soviets.

A suggested British compromise that would move the Allies closer to the Soviet position favoring permanent follow-up machinery and regular meetings has received less support. The French and the West Germans both find it unacceptable, and nearly all

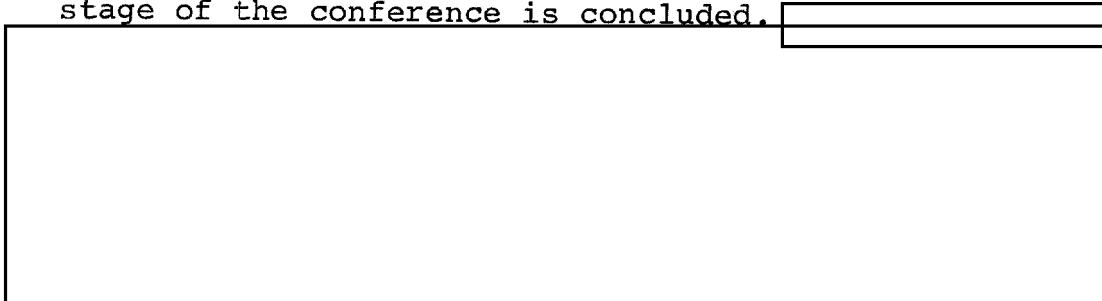
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of the Allies agree that, in any event, no concessions should be made in this area until the current stage of the conference is concluded.



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Stane Dolanc, secretary of the Yugoslav party executive committee, and Romanian party boss Ceausescu met last Friday and Saturday for substantive talks on bilateral party matters and "some topical international questions."

The talks were the latest installment in a long series of semi-annual discussions between Yugoslavia and Romania. The meeting--described as "friendly and cordial"--appears to have gone smoothly, thus extending the Tito-Ceausescu reconciliation begun last July after six months of disagreement over the last Arab-Israeli war.

Dolanc, the number-two man in the Yugoslav party, was sitting in for Tito who is receiving treatment for an unknown medical disability at a Montenegrin spa. The Yugoslav news media have reported that Tito has been sightseeing in the area, suggesting that he is not suffering any major health impairment.

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Bulgaria Shows Interest in
Cultural Agreement with US

The Bulgarians apparently want to assure Washington that despite the demise of the US-Soviet trade agreement Sofia is still interested in improving bilateral relations.

After months of foot-dragging on cultural negotiations, Lyuben Avramov, the head of the Americas Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told Ambassador Herz last week that a cultural agreement should be singled out "for early action." Avramov's comment came despite the fact that a number of draft bilateral economic cooperation agreements are still pending.

This latest move is apparently intended to keep alive the "friendship offensive" toward the US that Bulgaria launched late last year [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Sofia hopes to earn a larger share of the economic benefits of detente, and toward this end obviously feels it necessary to make concessions elsewhere in its relations with the US. The expansion of political contacts has been a particularly sensitive issue for Bulgaria.

Meanwhile, the Bulgarians have ruled out any trade agreement with Washington under the new US legislation. Recent press commentary has turned from polemics toward moderation, however, and the regime apparently desires to keep the way open for commercial relations even without MFN status.

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